Government of Tomorrow: The Problem of Power by Sir Oswald Mosley

Fascism and the old Democracy will both pass because neither is adequate to the facts of a new age. The mind and spirit of the European goes beyond them to a new thesis of life. Already the thought and the act of the future take shape. We reconcile the old conflicts and begin to achieve, to-day in thought and to-morrow in deed, the union of authority with liberty, action with thought, decision with discussion, power with responsibility, vigour with duty, strength with kindness, and service of the people with the attainment of ever higher forms of life.

The European Situation

CAN WE COMBINE the ability to act rapidly, which the people require from their government in a period of change and crisis, with the individual liberty which the people rightly require in their private lives ? If we can, we achieve the system of government which we all desire. Let us first try to clear away some confusions. There can never again be any question of dictatorship - in the sense of investing any individual with anything approaching sole power - within an European system. Any form of European government must have the character of an equipe, a team which acts together without any pre-eminent individual, in this case without even a captain. Apart from many other considerations, it is sufficient reason that the jealousies between the European peoples are so great that it is difficult enough to get them to act together at all (like the doomed Greek states in that civilisation of genius), without any question of elevating a national of some particular country to command over the others. But, in practice, this can work out very well. As in all other human affairs, where men have to work together, the ablest, whoever they are, tend in time to acquire the influence their qualities deserve. This occurs more rapidly in time of crisis, when decision is difficult and responsibility is heavy. There is always room at the top, when it is a mast-top on a very stormy night ; the competition diminishes as the storm mounts. On the other hand there is quite a jostle for the mayor's parlour, and the command of the annual bunfight, when the free drinks are going round on the ratepayer.

How leaders are found

In time of crisis men of character emerge to power because they are ready to take responsibility, and men of intellect tend to keep power because, on a series of testing occasions, they prove to be right. In practice this is how men acquire the influence with eminent colleagues, and with the mass of the people, which, in fact, gives them power. Again and again they are steady and resolute when others are shaken, and the probe of experience proves them more frequently than most men to be right. They win power because the chief men in a movement, or in a government, consequently believe that, on similar occasions, they are more likely than not to be right, to keep their nerve, and to act vigorously. Confidence thus slowly acquired among the distinguished, and among the mass of the people, is the factor which confers power on an individual. And, if we part from the illusions of propaganda, there is no other way any man can win the influence which is power in the modern state. He may so develop in the daily work of a government faced with arduous responsibilities, or in the long struggle of a revolutionary movement which is finally accorded power by the vote of the people ; in either case, his position and influence is reached through a practice of being more often right than wrong, and a capacity for calm, but decisive action which is repeatedly proven. And can we deny that this is the best way, to emerge by a natural testing to the exercise of power ? It is not a process which need, or should, have anything to do with the actions that are popularly conceived as dictatorship, and are deeply wrong.

Dictatorship : the definition of tyranny

Dictatorship, or tyranny, is the use of power to repress opposition and to deprive people you dislike, or find to be a nuisance, of their individual liberty. This can be, and has been, done in systems described as democratic, just as much as in systems described as totalitarian ; the only difference in kind, if not in degree, resides in the excuse. Some wanted such powers only for purposes of war, to defend or to destroy : others wanted such powers, also, for purposes of peace, to create or to build. So the democrats needed the excuse of war, while the totalitarians found the emergencies of peace to be sufficient excuse ; both were wrong. For it is at this point that we can clearly define the difference between liberty and tyranny. It is tyranny if a man is imprisoned, or maltreated, without trial, or by retrospective law. I pledged myself before the war that, under any government for which I had any responsibility, there would be no imprisonment

without trial, and I was not persuaded to ask for release from that pledge by later experiencing this outrage for myself. It is not only a crime against the very basis of individual liberty ; it is also a public confession of the incompetence or cowardice of a government. A government is incompetent which cannot frame, and persuade the people to pass, laws giving it all the authority necessary to carry out its duties. A government is cowardly which knows the powers it requires, but dare not ask for them until it can filch them in a moment of popular fury or panic ; it is in the position of a man who dares not fight his opponent, but awaits a chance to assassinate him.

The rule of law

In the extreme case of war, or of some great emergency of peace, it is utterly wrong to put the opposition in gaol by some hasty regulation, stating that you think they may be a danger to you, because they did something which you disapproved, but which was perfectly legal at the time it was done, some years before. Such procedure combines all the worst vices of arbitrary imprisonment with the retrospective pursuit of private vengeance ; it was the practice of British government in the late war. On the other hand, it is at least arguable that at a General Election the government should ask the people by their vote to confer on them power to declare an emergency for a limited period, and to pass clearly defined laws enabling them to bring all political conflict to an end, and to hold all citizens at the disposal of the nation for such a severely limited period. It would be a necessary safeguard that, in this event, an election should always be held at the end of the specified time, to confirm or condemn the action of the government ; certainly if any extension of the period should be required. Such a procedure would be clean, sensible, subject to the power of law and directly conferred by the people's will. The present practice of suspending the Habeas Corpus Act when panic is sufficient, is squalid, ignoble, a breach of our basic law, and a trickery of the people who have been promised freedom. Whether such reserve powers as those here suggested should ever be necessary can be a subject for debate and ultimate decision by the people's vote. We should at least now be able to agree, as first principles, that no one should be imprisoned without trial, and that no law should be retrospective ; it is as bad to try a man for something which was legal at the time he did it, as to hold him in prison without any trial at all. If we can agree these simple principles, we shall eliminate from the future the great crimes of tyranny, overt and covert, that have afflicted the immediate past.

The legitimate uses of power

There is a fundamental distinction between the abuse of power to infringe individual liberty and the use of power to implement the people's will ; yet abuse and use are often confused. The old liberal clichés concerning the corruption of power can be extended from a just indictment of tyranny to a thesis so unreasonable that it causes the paralysis of the state ; all power, even for the most beneficial ends, can become suspect. Yet without power the modern state cannot survive, and, a fortiori, any ordered movement to any higher form of existence cannot occur. It is too late to speculate on how agreeable the world might be without power, things have gone too far. There was something to be said for the philosophy of Gandhi, if you were prepared to live like Gandhi. A world in which men were ready to live on a bowl of rice, or a few home-grown vegetables, with a spinning-wheel for home-made clothes, without heat, light or communications more complex than the product of individual effort, could purchase the freedom of anarchy at the expense of an extreme simplicity of life. But men are not prepared so to live, and, in any case, there are now too many of them in the world to make the experiment practical. So power has to be entrusted to some men, somewhere, on some conditions, or life comes to an end. There is much to be said for never leaving the ground in an airplane, but there is nothing to be said for going up in the airplane and, at a height of ten thousand feet, deciding to strap up the pilot and leave the airplane to fly and land itself. It is unwise to do it even if you think the pilot is being too authoritative, even if you have clear reasons to believe he is not very competent, even if you can cite numerous cases of pilots crashing airplanes and killing the occupants : when all this is said, and proved, you still have a better chance to land safely if the pilot's hands are free than if he is tied up. Once you are down again you can change him, if you wish (and you would be well advised, after some bad experience, to see that pilots in future are properly trained for their work), but, when all is said and done, the fact remains that a machine so modern and so complex as an airplane cannot be flown without a pilot. You have to recognise that fact or spend the rest of your life on the ground. The lesson in terms of modern society is that we cannot get rid of power ; the most that we can hope is to make men fit for power, a problem with which Plato was so gravely, and still helpfully, exercised, so long ago. It should be possible for the world of the future to ensure that men are properly trained for power ; to define with more precision the terms within which power may be employed, and to

devise more effective machinery both for its exercise and its check. This essay is a preliminary attempt, in a new age of new facts, to provide a basis for the discussion of such a system.

The end of the totalitarian idea

The ideas of those who think as we do have certainly developed greatly since the war. They have, also, changed where past errors can be recognised. A man who lives a lifetime without changing any opinion has learnt nothing, and a man who lives a lifetime without learning anything is simply a fool. We leave to the gentlemen responsible for the present condition of the world the comfortable belief that they have made no past mistakes from which to learn.

In the light of experience it appears that the total idea of the totalitarian state should be abandoned. Like so many things before the war, it became a term of abuse and lacked clear definition. But for practical purposes it may be defined as a state in which only one party exists, and controls every other institution of the state. In England we did not admit before the war to being a totalitarian party because, unlike some movements on the continent, we provided for the possibility of our defeat and dismissal. Under the proposed constitution of that time the life of the government had to be submitted to a vote of the whole people at shorter intervals than the life of present parliaments, and, in the event of a government defeat, it remained the function of the Crown to send for other ministers whose position could be tested at a fresh vote. But we intended deliberately to bring all party warfare to an end ; alternative ministers could, therefore, only be chosen from men who had become eminent by other methods than the conduct of political parties. There was, and is, much to be said against the immense : waste of time, and distraction of national effort, which is inherent in party warfare, but, on the other hand, enough evidence now exists of the abuses to which a one party system can lead, to make it clearly right to discard from our theory and practice the last traces of totalitarianism.

There should be complete freedom for other parties to exist, and to enter the field as a political alternative, when the people vote for their government. But I would suggest that there should be a close season for party warfare in between elections. Neither government nor opposition parties should be free, in a perpetual campaign, to turn national life into a party dogfight. A period of a month or two before an election should be quite enough for rival parties to state their case to an adult electorate, which has probably already made up its mind on the record of the government.

The reconciliation of action and liberty

We suggest a parliament elected on an occupational and not a geographical franchise ; party warfare would automatically cease to exist in an assembly elected on completely different lines. As for controversy in the press, I would suggest a completely free press subject to one new condition ; any individual or institution - including the government - which was attacked in a newspaper, should be given, by law, the right to equal space in that paper for reply. This would in most cases reduce time-wasting and destructive controversy in the press to a minimum, as few newspaper owners would care very often to open their columns for their victims to say anything they liked in reply. In the case of an able and open-minded proprietor, who felt capable of coping with, and enjoying, such a situation, it might lead to much brighter newspapers ; but on the whole it would tend to squeeze the nonsense, unfairness, and untruth out of the press very quickly. It will be seen from the above suggestions that we have travelled very far beyond our pre-war position, have greatly developed and, where necessary, drastically changed it in the light of experience. It is necessary for us all to make a real new effort to combine the power to act as the people wish with a truly scrupulous preservation of personal liberty. In our hurry to serve the people with the action they desired, in a period where action was clearly necessary, we fell into some errors which could lead to the abuse of power ; even rapid action in such conditions can be too dearly bought. Nothing is more difficult than to devise a system of government which combines the power to act that the modern age requires, with a meticulous regard for individual liberty. It requires the contributions, both critical and constructive, of many minds for its full development. As a basis for discussion, I suggest the following summary.

Government

Government should rest on the direct vote of the people given at intervals not longer than three years. Other parties should be free to contest these elections, but not to conduct any campaign except in the two months preceding the election. The government in power should be responsible for foreign affairs, defence, order,

finance and science. It should also have the power to initiate legislation in parliament.

Parliament
Parliaments should be elected on an occupational and not on a geographical franchise, with the object of securing a practical and not a political assembly. Power in all social questions should rest with parliament, subject to the right of government to initiate legislation, and to check legislation by the refusal to finance. In the event of the necessary funds being refused, the parliament would have no direct redress against the government. On the other hand, parliament could thoroughly publicise the matter ; consequently, any party would be free to take up the point at the next election, and, thereby, to secure the defeat of the government, if the people agreed with it.

Judiciary
The judiciary would be entirely free and independent of government, and would administer laws, which, within their defined spheres, would be passed by government and parliament respectively. Its present position and prestige would not only be preserved but extended and enhanced. I would also suggest that a new branch of the judiciary should be constituted, and invested with powers which do not exist to-day. The first power would be to examine at any time, and anywhere, any possible corruption in government, and to publish findings if such corruption existed ; it would, of course, be possible for the government to reply, and the people could judge between government and judiciary and vote accordingly. The second power would be continually to examine new ideas and. to submit findings upon them to the government. In the event of the government refusing to implement an approved idea, the judiciary could publish the facts to the public ; the government would then be free to reply giving its point of view. Such ideas in a technical age of ever-increasing complexity are best discussed by experts in the judicial atmosphere of a law court : the proposer, critic, assessor procedure of my book The Alternative might provide some basis for consideration.

Press
The press should be quite free, but anyone attacked - whether individual, institution, government or party - should have equal space to reply.

Trade Unions
The trade unions should have the constructive task of co-operating with government in progressively raising wages over the whole field of industry, as, and when, science increased the power to produce. They would have not a lesser, but a greater, position and status than they have to-day. Reference to the trade unions as another "estate of the realm", would, in our proposals, cease to be only a phrase and become a fact.

Science and government
Science and government should become more and more as one. Statesmen and scientists should live and work together in this age as the statesmen of the renaissance lived and worked with artists. As society develops they should become more and more interchangeable. The men of the future should be part statesmen, part scientists.

The Crown
The position of the Crown is not discussed ; because it is unaffected by these proposals.

Clear definitions of functions
It will be seen that in this system we attempt, by clear definition of function, both to prevent the paralysis which sometimes arises in America during a conflict between government and legislature, and to prevent the time-wasting abuses of the perpetual party warfare in our present British parliament. The aim is, in our popular slogan, to give everyone a job to do and give him a chance to do it. In the crude terms of my old platform gibe we are not attracted by the concept of paying one man £10,000 a year to do a job, and another man £2,000 a year to stop him doing it - as in government and opposition procedure in our present House of Commons. Equally it seems to us a grave danger to the modern state, in a rapidly changing situation, if a paralysis can occur in government, as the American procedure permits. So we seek clearly to divide functions, while securing every possible check and safeguard to preserve individual liberty and to prevent

the abuse of power ; if more and better means can be devised to guard these essentials, we should welcome them.

Finance, clear and clean

A clear division of function, of course, involves some radical departures from existing practice ; for instance, full power of taxation and expenditure in the hands of the executive means a big change in tradition and outlook. The proposal cannot simply be defeated with the old slogan : "no taxation without representation". For the people would certainly be represented by a government which they had selected by their votes from among several parties at a general election. On the other hand the method has clear merits, which deserve some consideration. The time-wasting wrangle over finance each year, on purely party lines, would be eliminated, and the energies of many good men in government, and outside, would be freed for more constructive tasks. The possibility of financial abuse would be more effectively checked by the power of the judiciary to examine in detail what was going on, and its further power to report, if necessary, to the people. Also, the whole question of finance would be lifted right out of the sphere of interest lobbying and undercover intrigue, which is bound to exist as long as it remains a parliamentary matter. If it is the sole responsibility of the executive, the people will judge by their votes on the final record of the government as a whole, and both the pressure of interests and the delays of irrelevant discussion will be prevented. I nevertheless suggest that all the chief ministers should be subject to parliamentary questions, at least once a week, for one hour, on any subject, any man who knows his job should be ready to face that process and, in fact, men who are expert in the art of answering questions, after long practice, find the procedure so enjoyable and stimulating that it becomes a vice almost as pleasurable as alcohol to its victims. The trouble is usually to get the old boys to shut up, not to open up ; a government of action must beware of the joys of verbosity.

Order and the abuse of power

Order in the hands of the executive presents no great departure ; for all practical purposes it so resides to-day. If government made laws relating to order which abused power and infringed individual liberty, it would rightly anticipate short shrift at the next election ; there is no point on which it is, and would always be, so sensitive to public opinion. An absolute constitutional safeguard should be provided, as already suggested, against law which provided for imprisonment without trial, or was retrospective in effect ; the judiciary should have authority to quash any such law. Defence and foreign affairs are also, if we split no hairs, in the hands of the executive to-day ; mistakes in this region could be dealt with by the electorate, as they are now.

A serious Parliament

A parliament elected occupationally would be concerned with all the detailed complexity of modern state and industry. Expert subjects could be seriously discussed and decided by experts. Slapstick would yield to the yardstick of scientific thinking. Would it really be so much loss ? For anyone who enjoys the fun, the proposed public questioning of all responsible ministers would provide more than enough of the old-fashioned fare. 'On the other hand the form and work of parliament would become modern. The geographical franchise dates from the period when agriculture was the only occupation. The occupational franchise simply brings the franchise up to date. We can, consequently, have some hope that parliamentary discussion and decision will, also, come up to date.

Extended powers of the judiciary

Some people may be alarmed by such an extension of the powers of the judiciary. This seems necessary if we are to give a government power to act, while carefully maintaining individual liberty and preventing the abuse of power. It may, also, seem fantastic that anything approaching a new idea could emerge from the procedure of a law court. For this purpose we clearly need a new branch of the judiciary acting on a new principle ; it must be imbued more by the urgency of a persisting dynamism in an age of continual change, than by the necessarily static sense of justice which administers existing law. We need the clarity of the legal mind infused with the necessity of action ; a combination not outside the bounds of possibility. The aim is to have new ideas discussed in an atmosphere where reason prevails and truth can emerge. Judges versed in the facts of the new age seem the people best fitted to sum up the discussion between those who propose and those who oppose new ideas. Their report would enable the executive to act on well considered facts. If the executive refuse to act, when the facts indicated the necessity, the judges could

again report to the people. Will real power then reside with judges, who will interfere with everything and intimidate weak executives ? The answer is, surely, no. The responsibility for action will clearly rest with the executive ; judges could report to the people, but not overrule the executive. Further, the executive will have the right to reply to any report by the judges to the people, and, in the executive will be men who are expert in the art of controversy. Judges dislike looking silly, and they are right, because to avoid looking foolish is a part of their metier ; they will not interfere unless they are on very sound ground, and their intervention will then be necessary. Their role will be both negative and positive ; their task will be not only to prevent corruption, abuse and scandal, but to stimulate new ideas. The object of the whole business is, of course, to cut out foolish cackle, to get serious matters considered seriously, and, consequently, to get things done on a true judgment of the facts.

Press and the truth

It is desirable that the press should serve the people, with news, rather than the interests of the owners ; likewise the trade unions should serve the interests of their members ; rather than the politics of their leaders. It might be necessary to add to the press proposals a provision for prosecution if it could be proved that a newspaper had deliberately published something which it knew to be untrue ; but it is preferable to reduce such restrictions to a minimum, and the right of a maligned individual or institution to reply should be sufficient. The press might be compensated in some degree for this irk by some modification of the present too restrictive law of libel, which tends to prevent free discussion.

Free discussion but decisive action

We want discussion to have the utmost freedom, provided it does not waste too much time in an age in which decision and action are vital. Let us provide every facility for discussion of all subjects, and create a diversity of means for this purpose ; perhaps after all my old saying : "everything should be discussed, but only by those who understand at all the subject" infringed liberty too much!. But let us preserve those responsible for action from ceaseless talk ; they must have some time for their creative tasks. For my part I like controversy, because I think it always advances our cause. I never mind the other man having his say, because, rightly or wrongly, I always feel that I can find a complete answer, that the exchange will leave us not weaker but stronger. Some may think this confidence mistaken, or even arrogant, but I feel it very strongly, and it has some basis in experience. Yet this is all very well when you are in opposition, and your task is to advance a new cause. Those in government must be left some time for the work of government. That is why it is suggested there should be a close time for political controversy except at the election period. In between elections, it would, of course, be necessary for the government to explain directly to the people over radio and television what they were doing. In fact, it would be necessary much more frequently than at present for a government which acted on my principle that "the people should always know what the government is doing, and the government should always know what the people are thinking". On such occasions it would seem fair that all opposing parties should have the right of criticism over the same medium, and that the government should have the right of reply, if it desired.

The true democracy

In this short essay it has been necessary to cover much ground in a very cursory survey. The argument and the proposals are necessarily compressed and baldly stated. But I hope enough has been said to make clear their meaning and purpose. In any case they can form a basis for the discussion we welcome. The object is clearly to combine the system of rapid action which the present age requires, with the full maintenance of individual liberty and every possible check against the abuse of power. It remains true that the only means to a free individual life, and to the full development of the human personality, is the creation of a system which gives leisure and a higher standard of life ; this requires drastic and continuing action by government in modern conditions. It is equally necessary to preserve the right of the individual to use these resources as he wishes, and, by using his vote, to participate in the direction and control of the whole. We believe this system to be the true democracy, because it enables the collective will of the people to be carried out, without the infringement of the individual's liberty. We believe that the mass of the people, if they are not deceived by artifice or confusion, and if they can learn the facts as they are revealed by a calm and ever developing vision of truth, will always will the good.

Oswald Mosley - 1955